

## Working with your Influencers

One of the key skills you will need to master as a leader is how to work with other leaders in your church. Here are a few principles to think about.

**1. Know who your influencers are.** This may sound like a "duh!" statement but the principle is often overlooked. As leaders we tend to want to work with those who match our personality or agree with us or whom we like. But these people are not always the key influencers in your church. The influencers may not even have a formal leadership title. It is not difficult to learn who these leaders are. The influencers are the ones who others look to for direction and guidance when decisions are being made. The influencers are the ones who others want to hear from before others make up their minds on proposals. If the influencers are not with you, most likely it will be very difficult to make changes you are desiring to make. So it is important to know who they are. And remember, each major group in the church has their own key influencers. The senior adult group, the women's group, the young adult group, the church board and other groups like this all have their own influencers. If a change is to affect any of these groups, it is important to being in contact with the influencers in that group. It will be much easier to make changes when the influencers are with you.

**2. You must model what you preach.** Nothing will kill your influence quicker than having credibility issues. Psalm 78:72 gives us our biblical mandate from the example of King David: *"And David shepherded them with integrity of heart, with skillful hands he led them."* The leader must lead the way.

**3. Understand personality differences.** Everyone has a way of seeing the world and communicating our desires. Some are "bottom-line" people, others more relationship oriented. Some want just the "big picture." Others are looking for details. Some need to "see" what you are proposing like in a diagram. Others can grasp the "picture" through your words or reading a book. Knowing how your leaders process information can help you communicate in ways they will understand. How do you get to know the personality of your leaders? The next point will help you.

**4. Spend time together.** Your leaders need to know your heart and you need to know them. This only happens as you spend time together outside regular business meetings. Grabbing a coffee in an informal environment can open doors for people to share what is on their heart and mind. During these informal times together you can be an encouragement to each other. Another way to spend time together is by praying together. Again, you each share your hearts as you talk with God. And God can bring a closeness of hearts and minds during these times that is not possible any other way. Going to learning events together can be of great value. Much of the benefit of attending seminars together is the interaction time before, during and after the event. Often this is of more value than the contents of the event itself.

**5. Quickly handle conflict.** In any close relationship, disagreements are inevitable. It is important to get these cleared up as soon as you become aware there may be a problem. It is okay for leaders to disagree and come to a point of "agreeing to disagree." It is not okay to trample on emotions and let anger build. Often, conflict is a result of just not taking the time to listen and hear the viewpoints of others.

**6. Communicate!** Rick Warren has good advice: People are usually down on what they're not up on. Make sure your influencers know what is going on and what is on your mind. Learn how your leaders best like to be kept informed: Facebook, texts, emails, phone calls, discussions in the hallways, notes, etc. Keeping your influencers informed takes time, but without it most ideas will falter and you may discover that some of your influencers are blocking forward progress.

**7. Share a compelling vision.** Key influencers are influencers because others have perceived them as worthy of listening to and heeding their vision and direction. Which means if you are going to move forward these key influencers must join you in a shared vision for the future. Having a vision for the future means change. For the influencers to guide this change with you they will want to have a clear understanding to some of these questions:

- Who are we as a community of believers? What is our identity?
- Where are we going?
- Why are we going there?
- How are we going to get there?
- How can they help you get there?

These influencers will need to feel a part of the process. How can you accomplish that? Steve Jones, the district superintendent of Central District for the Missionary Church, shared a great idea at a leadership retreat. Let's say you have four key influencers at your church named Tom, Pete, John and Jim. You go to your top influencer and share some of your ideas but then you ask, "Tom, this is rough. There are holes in the idea. How can we make this better?" As Tom begins to share his own ideas you have a better plan. Then you go to your second influencer. You share the ideas. Then you ask, "Pete, Tom and I have a rough sketch here, but there are holes. How can we make this better." You approach each of your influencers in this manner. At the end you have a much better idea and when you get back with each of your influencers they know they have been part of the process. They can help you communicate this idea with others and help pave the way when the implementation process begins.

**8. Pray!** This is the most important principle. Jesus told us, "apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). This includes working with your influencers. God can do more than you could ever imagine to bring your key influencers around to share a God given vision. So talk to God about your own heart and the hearts of those in leadership. Ask God to give all of you wisdom (James 1:5) and to protect all of you from the evil schemes of the Devil who wants to breed disunity (John 17:15).

Following these principles will help you realize the vision that God is stirring in your heart and bring alongside you the team to make it happen.